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Watson's Affectionate Address
to London South Circuit-

1829

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AN

AFFECTIONATE ADDRESS

TO THOSE

TRUSTEES, STEWARDS, LOCAL PREACHERS,
AND LEADERS,

OF

The London South Circuit,

WHOSE NAMES ARE AFFIXED TO CERTAIN RESOLUTIONS,

BEARING DATE, SEPTEMBER 23, 1828.

BY RICHARD WATSON.

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Bearing Date, Sept. 23, 1828.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

My personal knowledge of several of you who have signed the Resolutions abovementioned, and the hope that you may weigh attentively what I shall dispassionately and in the most friendly spirit suggest to you on the subject of the document to which you have put your names, are the reasons why I address myself to your attention.

With many of my Brethren, I indeed hoped that, upon reflection, and the conversations which your Address must have occasioned, you would have felt that you had been greatly misled in attaching your names to opinions which, however plausibly presented to you, are easily shown to be wholly inconsistent with the essential and fundamental principles upon which the Connexion to which you belong has been ever established. Since, however, I find from the recent circulation of your Resolutions in this and some neighbouring Circuits, that you are, by your zeal, likely to commit yourselves still farther, and to render it the more difficult to retrace your steps, (for in proportion to the pains we take to disseminate our views, we place ourselves under a stronger temptation to resist all evidence of their deceptiveness,) I feel disposed to undertake the not agreeable, but still the friendly, office of pointing out the errors into which you have fallen.

I cannot perceive, from your Resolutions, that you have any grievance to urge springing from the government of your successive Superintendents in your own Circuit, or from the interference of the Conference in any case which has arisen among yourselves. You have gone on from year to year in peace; no individual, and no society in your Circuit, having had any reason to complain, yourselves being judges, of oppression and injustice. The pious among you have been nurtured; you have increased in number; and our

discipline has preserved your purity, and, till very recently, your peace. A system which has for so long a time accomplished its proposed purpose in your religious conversion, your edification, and your purity, cannot, one should suppose, be very far wrong. Had there been any such disposition to exercise a tyrannical power over our societies by the Conference, and by the Preachers it appoints, as your Resolutions insinuate, is it not somewhat remarkable that you should have no instance of it to allege affecting yourselves? none drawn from the other metropolitan Circuits, in which there have been occasional disputes? and that the instance on which you dwell should be so recent, and so far from you? You have professed your determination not to forsake the body, and you thus still acknowledge the privilege of union with it; and perhaps, upon reflection, you will find that the good which exists among us is much less mixed with evil than you have hastily admitted; and that there is a much better reason for your remaining with us, than to oppose a "growing corruption," which, after all, may possibly exist only in your own surmisings.

You appear to me, my Brethren, in the first place, too much to have lost sight of the fact, that the religious body to which we belong is a **CONNEXION**; that is, a number of societies who have agreed to unite themselves in a *common bond* of doctrine and discipline, under a *common code* of regulations and usages, and under a *common government*. Our societies are not **INDEPENDENT** churches. This is an ecclesiastical form which some prefer; but it is not our form; nor do I perceive that in fact you wish it so to be; although the great principle of your Resolutions is that of Independence, and accords with no other system. An Independent church can change its ministry, its doctrine, and its discipline, at the pleasure of the majority of its members; it is complete within itself, and spurns all external control; but our very union implies the submission of each society to the influence and opinion of the whole; to the Rules agreed upon, or which may be thought necessary for the benefit of the Connexion at large; and to those Authorities which, by tacit or express consent, are appointed to maintain that Christian "order" in which we have placed ourselves, in furtherance of our religious edification and usefulness,—the only true ends of church communion.

That you have not carefully considered this subject, is proved by the leading principle in your Address to the last Conference, and in your Resolutions,—which is, that Leaders' Meetings, Local Preachers' Meetings, and Quarterly Meetings, are "local jurisdictions;" into which no District Meeting or Conference has the

power to intrude. For how does that principle accord with your connexion with, and subjection to, the whole body? You must either prove that such an Independency as this principle assumes, has, by the terms of this union, been conceded; which, if proved, would surprise all with the novel discovery that the Connexion is *not one body*, as it has always been thought; but a coalition of Independent societies, which it was never before assumed to be, in any disputes which have arisen on constitutional points: Or, failing of that proof, I think you must perceive that the principle you have laid down is wholly inconsistent with that form of ecclesiastical order with which you have voluntarily chosen to connect yourselves. If the question be, whether our Societies shall now, for the first time, take the Independent form of church government, let that be fairly proposed and argued upon its own merits; but if, as I believe, you wish not to moot such a question, at least the majority of you, then ask yourselves whether you can abide by your own Resolutions? When, and how, that control and interference which is implied in a union like ours, is to be exercised, are distinct questions, on which more may be said in the sequel; but that each of our societies is subject, by the very nature of its union with the body, to the control of that body, through its Authorities, in order to the accomplishment of the holy ends of its institution, is so obvious, that no contrary principle can be set up without involving a change in the very essence of the system, and renouncing that "Constitution" which you profess yourselves so zealous to "maintain."

Since the Connexion cannot act but through the *Authorities* to which I have adverted, you will allow me a few words upon this subject; which, as it has often, in such disputes, been very vaguely spoken of, I will enter into with you very frankly: For the more clearly we perceive our system to rest on Holy Scripture, and the reason of things, the more firmly I am persuaded shall we be united to maintain and cherish it.

We did not, my Brethren, create Methodism. That honour is not ours. We found it, or rather it found us; we were welcomed with kindness within its refuge, and we have sat in spiritual safety beneath its shadow. When the oldest of you first turned to its assemblies, inquiring, "What must I do to be saved?" it had then, and had long possessed, A DOCTRINE, A DISCIPLINE, and A COMMON GOVERNMENT. That government was in the hands of its Founder; it passed from him, by his own appointment, into the hands of the Conference; and was finally settled there, by consent of all, under certain regulations which respected the ADMINISTRATION of its powers. This has been the state of things to this day.—We are under a

government *common* to all the societies ; that government is vested in the Conference, but subject to various regulations which restrain its exercise. Nothing new *in principle* has therefore been introduced of which you can complain ; and if any just reason of dissatisfaction exists, it can only be found in the *acts* of the Conference, or of some other subordinate Authority, not in any fundamental change of the system.

I do not wish for a moment therefore to disguise the fact, grating as it may be to the ears of those who would wish to govern both us and you, that you are under the government of your Ministers, checked, as I have observed, and, as I think, effectually, against all injurious use of their powers ; of which check and restraint I am not only the friend, but would, if required, be the zealous advocate to the best of my ability. But, on the other hand, Brethren, much as you have heard of the power of the Conference, I think it very easy to convince you, that the sum of that power is nothing more than the power which is essentially vested in each Minister, by the very duties which he is under **SCRIPTURAL** obligation to perform ; with the addition of that *conventional* authority which arises out of the voluntary act of each member of the body, in choosing that form of church government which excludes **INDEPENDENCY**, and takes that of a **CONNEXION**.

You acknowledge us to be Ministers of Christ, and Pastors of his Church ; for if, as to the legitimacy of our Ministry, we have disputes with others, we can have none with you. It is then the duty of a Minister, not only to preach the Gospel, but to collect all who profess to have received his message into communion with the Church of Christ ; this being an obligatory ordinance of God. It is his duty to watch over all such with pastoral care, in order to their spiritual advancement in knowledge and grace ; and to reprove and rebuke the careless, the obstinate, and unruly, with all “long-suffering and doctrine.” It is equally his duty to separate immoral and unruly persons from the flock, after due admonition ; and to show leniency and forbearance, in this exercise of discipline, in hopeful cases. It devolves upon him also to provide for the perpetuation of the Ministry, by encouraging those who may give evidence of a fitness and a call to preach the Gospel ; also to appoint subordinate agents to assist him in various departments of his work, when it swells beyond the limit of his personal exertions ; to guard the doctrine of all subordinate Teachers, as well as their conduct ; and to visit all offenders, in this respect, according to the merits of the case. Finally, it is his duty also to excite the people by his exhortations to such liberalities in the proper support of their own religious institutions, in providing for the poor and sick, and in other branches of

religious charity, as the Gospel requires ; that they may abound, not only in good works generally, but "in this grace also." All these *duties* are inherent in the very office of a Christian Pastor ; and all the *powers* necessary to fulfil them do therefore of right, inalienable right, belong to his office ; and this, whatever form of church government he may minister under, though it should be that of Independence. Nor is it for a people to deny to their Ministers such powers, any more than to refuse the Ministry which God has appointed ; the one being as opposed to Scripture as the other. If they take the Ministry as an ordinance of God, they must take it with its *duties*, and with its *powers* to perform them. That these powers should be unchecked as to their exercise, is a position for which no reasonable man will contend. Both Ministers and people are men, and the imperfect state of the Church on earth, and the liability of all to temptation, will show, that whilst the powers of discipline, inherent in the office of the Ministry itself, and without which it cannot exist, may be factiously opposed by the errors and passions of the people, so they may be misdirected by the errors and passions of Ministers. To insure, therefore, the right application of the powers of the Christian Ministry, the counsel of the "elders" of a church (by whatever name they are called in different societies, matters not) ought to be taken ; and in them ought also to be vested a right to prevent the exercise of these powers for ends not legitimate ; that is, should they be manifestly used for the gratification of private prejudice, interest, ambition, or other unworthy passions. But whatever provisions for counsel, or for restraint, are devised, two great principles must regulate them all when a Church is scripturally constituted : 1. *That such provisions imply no transfer of powers inherent in the Ministry to those who are not in that office :* 2. *That the checks, of whatever kind they may be, shall not, under pretence of preventing the misuse of those powers, obstruct the legitimate and scriptural exercise of them for the regulation, edification, and increase of the graces and numbers of the Church.*

Every Minister, even of an Independent church, has a right to claim these principles, in his agreement to labour with any people. He may be required to take the opinion of his Church as to the fitness of persons to be received into their communion ; but he is the person admitting : He may be restrained from excluding until delinquency is proved before the Church ; but he is the person excluding : The consent of the people may be taken before the admission of any one into the Ministry ; but he and his brethren in the Ministry are the parties ordaining. If his people so act with him as to further the legitimate exercise of his Ministry, and to restrain nothing but a mistaken or selfish use of its powers, well ; but if he

subject himself to such a control as would make the power of fulfilling his duties dependent absolutely upon others, he would by that act so far divest himself of his office, as to share it with others, whilst he himself remains under its full and sole responsibility to God ;—a condition of serious consideration with him, and under which he has certainly no scriptural power to place himself. It is clear that even in an Independent Church, if the office of the Minister be not usurped, and, so to speak, put into a commission of which the Minister himself is but the nominal head, there may be cases of which the ultimate decision must rest with him. Should a Church refuse to admit into its communion persons brought to God under his Ministry, and on whom he enjoins the scriptural obligation of Christian communion, and that without any reason but a factious opposition ; or should it resist the expulsion of persons notoriously wicked, and proved to be so on unquestionable evidence, from laxity of moral feeling in the majority of the members, or from the same factious spirit ; the rightful, scriptural exercise of his ministry is arrested ; and either he must compel obedience by the force of his authority, or, if a man of conscience, must abandon so rebellious a flock, and seek one of a more Christian character. There is in this case a clear power of Pastoral *rule*, checked as to its exercise, but not to be factiously or corruptly obstructed ; and this *rule* is manifestly established upon the duties made obligatory upon the Minister, by the very nature of his office itself.

All the difference between this case, and that of a body existing like ourselves in the form of a Connexion, is in favour of the latter. The Ministers that compose it may in the exercise of their pastoral duties be restrained, with equal ease and security, from an improper exercise of their scriptural powers as in an Independent Church ; whilst every Minister when factiously opposed by a society, or any part of a society, instead of being placed in the alternative of offending his conscience, or of quitting his charge, has the power of resorting to Authorities, acknowledged both by the people and by himself, for a redress of the grievance, by the interposition of counsel or discipline, as the case may require. The same advantage is also placed by such a form of church government in the hands of the people. It would seldom happen that a whole Society would be found thus contumacious and corrupt ; but in an Independent Church, where can the better part of the members, still anxious to preserve purity of doctrine and discipline, find redress ? If a minority, they would have none but in separation ; whilst in the case of their being part of a Connexion, they, equally with the Minister, would have their appeal to the *common Authority*. We may suppose another case, in which a Minister himself might be negligent of his duties in all

the respects above mentioned, and yet be supported by the most influential part of an Independent Church. Here the Minister himself refuses to exert the powers of his office from a corrupt subserviency to a few, and the rest have no remedy but in separation;—an injustice which is prevented wherever there is a power of appeal to an interposing Authority.

The object of these remarks, my Brethren, is to remind you that there is in the Ministry a scriptural authority to rule the Church of God for its edification; that the regulation of its administration is not a repeal of the authority itself; and that both Ministers and people, when formed into a Connexion, possess a privilege which they could not enjoy, if, like the Independent Churches, they could call in no aid in cases of partial corruption and contumacy. What then is the power of the Conference? As composed of the Ministers of the Societies of Methodism, it is itself a Body, collectively directing by its counsel the exercise of the powers of the Ministry as discharged by individuals,—in the reception and expulsion of members, the calling out of Ministers, the maintenance of sound doctrine, the appointment and duties of subordinate officers and assistants in their spiritual work, and the exciting of Christian liberality among the people. Here individual Ministers think that united counsel is the best directory for the exercise of the duties and powers of their office, and agree to discharge them under a body of common regulations. To the people, as in 1797, are granted certain checks upon the possible abuses of power; against the possible abuse of which checks themselves, however, an APPEAL always lay to the Conference from any person whatever thinking himself aggrieved. The whole Connexion has gone on by mutual consent upon these regulations.

The leading guards against undue exercise of power, as to the people, are, that when a Leaders' Meeting declare a person unfit to be admitted into society, no Preacher shall receive him as a member; and that the delinquency of a member must be proved in the presence of a Leaders' Meeting, before he can be expelled. These instances are sufficient for my argument; and I need not, therefore, go into the case of Local Preachers, Trustees, Leaders, or into financial regulations. The question then before us is, whether the Conference in 1797, or at any other time, conceded more than a power to guard the exercise of the rights of the Ministry against abuse; or whether it divided the duties and powers of the Ministry with the Leaders' Meeting? If the latter, we who are in the Ministry, much more than you, are concerned in the new discovery which has been made as to the meaning of the Rules of 1797;

for if the Conference then introduced a power, in the strict sense, co-ordinate with the Ministry, and placed the discharge of its duties conjointly in the Preachers and those meetings ; then it left us with all the weight of our responsibility to God, who has called us to these duties, who has made it obligatory upon us to discharge them at our peril ; and yet made the power, not merely to guard their manner of performance, but to discharge them at all, under any circumstances, dependent upon co-ordinate authorities ;--then has a Leaders' Meeting, *in all cases*, no matter how unfounded, the power to forbid us to receive members into the Church, to restrain us from expelling immoral members, to oblige us not to show leniency to the penitent, to prevent us from banishing away "strange doctrines,"—and so of every other ministerial duty ; and that simply by withholding its concurrence : For if it is a co-ordinate power, in no case can we act without its concurrence. Nor is there any advantage derived here from our existing as a Connexion, since all appeal is shut out ; and if this surrender of ministerial rights forms a part of the compact, the reasoning in your Address and Resolutions is sound, the Conference itself cannot interfere to relieve any case however flagrant ; and both Ministers, and the sound part of our people, are left without remedy. No absurdity, however, can be greater than that which this strange and novel view attributes to the Conference of 1797 ; viz., that it should make co-pastors of men who are not Pastors,—co-ministers of our excellent friends, the Leaders, who never professed to be Ministers ; and so invest them with the duties and powers of an office which they disclaim. They knew well, and you also upon reflection must see, that certain powers are inseparable from the duties of the Ministry, and cannot be transferred, or put into commission with those who have not this calling ; and that, therefore, the Rules of 1797 were intended to guard the exercise of these powers by the Preachers, but in no case either to abolish them or to transfer them to others. The Conference of 1797 retained, and could not but retain, for the Ministers of the body all these powers to fulfil the work and office of the Ministry, whilst it conceded to the people certain privileges by which those powers were in their administration to be regulated.

The power to discharge the scriptural duties of our office being then inherent in every Minister among us charged with pastoral duties, the Conference in maintaining this power has assumed no authority but what belongs scripturally to each of its members. It has, however, a *conventional* power arising out of the voluntary association of the body according to our form of church government. As a Connexion we look up to it as the common governing

body to which all are subject. This was necessarily supposed in the regulations of 1797. For if, on the one hand, the Conference could make no surrender of the powers essential to the Ministry ; and, on the other, consented to certain regulations being imposed upon their administration ; how was that "compact," as you term it, to be enforced against those who might attempt its violation, in either direction, but by the Conference itself ? If a Preacher had proceeded to expel a member without respect to the Rule requiring his guilt to be proved in the presence of a Leaders' Meeting, to whom would the appeal have been made by the Meeting, but to the Conference, or to its subordinate Authorities ? Not only the *right*, but the *duty*, of its interference would then have been asserted by you, and that justly. If then a case should, on the other hand, arise, in which a Preacher should be factiously obstructed in the *legitimate exercise* of the duties of his Ministry, was the Preacher, and was that part of the people remaining faithful to these duties and to these principles, to be cut off from the same benefit of their own form of church government,—that of having a common court of appeal, and a common government,—under pretence that the Conference cannot interfere with "local jurisdictions ?" Such a pretence is as unjust as it is absurd, because it forces upon one party the control of a *common Discipline*, and leaves the other to sport in all the license of *Independency*.

Of the necessity of maintaining such a power of remedial interference you seem not to be sufficiently aware ; nor to recollect that our *people* are interested in it quite as much as we are, and we indeed only for them. You seem to think that your Ministers only are liable to offend against the spirit and letter of our discipline ; and forget that there is at least equal danger, that societies or parts of societies should place themselves in an unconstitutional and disorderly attitude ; and that, therefore, the interference of Conference, or of its District Committees, in the affairs of a Circuit, in order to uphold the doctrine or discipline of the body, is a power of interposition in which our people at large, as one body, and the peaceable and sound members of the agitated society in particular, have a right to require of the Conference. The Connexion, by the blessing of God, has been for several years past in great peace ; the discipline of the body being carried generally into effect by the united efforts of Preachers and Leaders. False doctrines have seldom sprung up ; immorality has not been winked at ; useful and pious men have been encouraged to labour in different departments of the Church ; and the prevalent desire has been, not to innovate upon our discipline, but to maintain it. But will any thinking man assume, as the basis of an argument on a question of government,

that this will always be the case in all the societies ? There have been occasional exceptions of a serious kind already, although the days of primitive simplicity and piety are far from having passed away ; and cases of this kind must be expected to occur by every one who considers that we, like others, are a part of "the Church in the wilderness;" and that we have no promise of exemption from the assaults of the subtlety and malice of the devil, and the corruptness of our unsanctified nature. But you appear to think that no evil can spring up in a particular society which that society itself cannot remedy. Certainly, so long as the majority of its officers and members remain sound in our doctrines, attached to our institutions, and spiritual in their habits, this will be the case, and the regulations of 1797 suppose this. Then there needs no interposition, but that of the Ministers and Officers of a society itself; and it is because the majority in most of our societies have remained faithful, and the persons requiring the exercise of discipline, in most cases, have been few in number, that you have seldom heard of any interference with the Circuits by the Districts or the Conference. Still there have been a sufficient number of cases to show how necessary and beneficial such a power of interposition is ; and had there been none at all, since "it must needs be that offences will come," are you acting considerately to lend yourselves to advocate a principle which, in cases not to be remedied without external interposition, would shut out the right of such an interference by a new law, or by a new and forced interpretation of an old one ? Some of our societies, with their Leaders and Local Preachers, have, in times past, been infected with Arianism, Socinianism, and Universalism ; others have been disposed to wink at certain forms of Sabbath-breaking, at smuggling, at other immoralities ; others have, by the influence and mischievous agency of a few, been rendered in part politically disloyal ; others have been inducted into views of church government opposed to the first principles of that under which we have voluntarily chosen to live, and, instead of peaceably withdrawing, have only endeavoured to promote tumult and strife. Now where the minority is small, and the leading parties uninfluential, the sound majority may deal with such cases ; but what is to be done when the minority is formidable, or when the majority are infected ? Suppose that in your own respectable society, the majority of Local Preachers and Leaders were to imbibe and teach false doctrines ;—and if the Primitive Churches fell by this means, what security have you against this trial of your faith ?—or suppose them to become the advocates of a lax discipline ; or to embrace Independent notions of church government ; or factiously to resist the enforcement of those very

Rules of the body which you yourselves at present hold sacred,—all which are possible cases,—how then would the doctrine of the inviolability of your “local jurisdictions,” which you have been taught, affect you? In an Independent Church we have seen what the result would be. The only remedy for the minority would be submission to evil, or expulsion from their place of worship,—a result which frequently takes place. This would be your case too, if the doctrine of inviolable local jurisdiction were established in its complete form; for it must, when perfected, extend to your chapels also,—a point at which many have aimed, as well knowing its bearing. But the constitution under which you now are placed provides your remedy; the chapels are secured to the use of those who love the doctrines which only can be preached in them; and the sound minority, by the interference of the Authority to which they have now a right to appeal, can be defended against a fallen or a misled majority, on whom the inconvenience of separation from the body alone would fall, as is just. Your principle of local jurisdiction would protect, in such a case, none but the foward, corrupt, and unruly; the system, as now established, is hostile only to the guilty, protective only to the innocent.

But you perhaps ask, “Allowing that the inherent rights of the Ministry are not to be infringed upon, what is our remedy in case any Minister should set at nought the guards which our present Constitution has placed upon their exercise, in cases where no faction, no inclination to erroneous doctrine, no laxity of feeling as to discipline, can be charged upon the Local Preachers or Leaders?” The very Rules of 1795 and 1797, on which you attempt to put an hitherto-unknown construction, direct you; and as you are by them empowered to accuse the offender before a District Meeting, and finally before the Conference, you must perceive that those very Rules to which you have appealed do not in the least infringe upon the original power of the Conference as the body to which, as vested with the common government of the whole Connexion, the appeal must be made. Yet even in the case of a Preacher being in fault, do you not see how, by shutting out the right of the Conference to interfere, your doctrine of local jurisdiction might possibly fetter you? A Preacher might act in this heady and tyrannous manner, and yet take the majority of Leaders with him; and if your Leaders’ Meeting be a jurisdiction not to be interfered with in so extreme a case, where then would be the remedy of the injured minority? By this, and many other instances which might be supposed, you may be convinced that the power of the Conference is not for itself, but for the people at large; so long as they hold the doctrines, and remain attached to the discipline, to which they now profess their preference.

You may indeed say, that "the Conference itself may fall into the very evils to which you have supposed a particular society to be liable." This I grant: I know of nothing human which may not be corrupted, and of no human guards which can effectually prevent this, independent of the special blessing of God. This, however, is the advantage of our existing in the Church-form of a CONNEXION, and not as Independents, that great bodies are less liable to change than smaller ones; and that a body composed as ours is, has within itself more internal checks and counteractions than that particular Independency which your Resolutions would set up. A Connexion, too, like ours, commenced and matured whilst the spirit of piety and zeal is in activity in every part, necessarily makes the best provision which anxious care and prudent foresight, under that divine guidance which it seeks, and of which it has the promise, can devise, against corruptions both of doctrine, discipline, and practice. Such provisions we have; and so far have they exerted a conservatory influence, that we may confidently appeal to the people, whether at any former time the Conference was more distinguished for character, for pastoral care, for attachment to our original doctrines, and for the efficiency of discipline, both as to itself and its enforcement through the Preachers in the societies. It is only for the supposed love of power that we have been charged by the modest part of our recent adversaries; and it is scarcely more than in this respect that you have echoed their sentiments. If this love of power, however, do exist, it is manifestly confined to the Conference in its *collective capacity*, and does not show itself in its protection of any who may have employed it unwarrantably in their Circuits. You have no complaint of this kind, nor can you, I believe, fix upon a clear instance which has not been treated by the Conference according to its deserts; for the Rules of 1795 and 1797, in their fair and consuetudinary interpretation, are always considered by the Conference as the final rule of decision. Undoubtedly, both Preachers' and Leaders' Meetings, too, are often *accused* of being arbitrary; which may be easily accounted for. Not a few of our members, and even of those holding office, are very imperfectly acquainted, through their own neglect, with our real system of government, and indeed with the just principles of church government in general. Some also come among us, with views which, from education and association, are favourable to Independency; and others are often misled by the plausible generalities of the disaffected. To such persons the steady maintenance of our own principles will often appear arbitrary; partly, because they are restrained by them; and partly, from their want of information. But the fact of arbitrary government is not proved by their allegations; and the case is to be decided by those who have known us best and longest: And from

them no complaints as to the ordinary administration of our discipline have been heard.

Of the power exercised by the Conference *collectively*, you however have complained in a case to which I will briefly advert. It is the sanctioning, by the Conference, of the proceedings of the Special District Meeting held at Leeds last year on the disputes in that society. Into the particulars of that case it is not necessary to enter; since with you the main question is said to be a CONSTITUTIONAL one; and in your Address and Resolutions you go into general principles, and except mainly to the interference of the Conference or of a District Meeting in the "local affairs" of any Circuit, as contrary to the "compact of 1797;" when that power of interference you have been taught to believe, and have been much too hasty to affirm, was given up. When you dwell upon the case of a Special District Meeting interfering to take cognizance of proceedings on the part of Leaders, Stewards, and Local Preachers at Leeds, and from that take occasion to exclaim against all such interferences with the "local affairs" of a Circuit, did you, my Brethren, intend to exclaim against all such interferences of every kind in the affairs of Circuits? I ask you the question, because, in the Rules of Pacification, and the Regulations of 1797, to which you so often refer, you must have seen, if you carefully read those documents yourselves, (which I doubt,) and did not implicitly follow some unfaithful guide, (which I fear,) that the Plan of Pacification gives to a majority of the Trustees, or to the majority of the Stewards and Leaders of any society, the power of calling such a Special Meeting of the District, in order to try any Preacher appointed for the Circuit, on charges of immorality, deficient abilities, or violation of Rule; of which Meeting the Trustees, Stewards, and Leaders are to be members; so that if the charges are considered to be proved by the majority of that Meeting, he may be removed from the Circuit. This was a large concession to the people, to enable you to free yourselves from an improper or imprudent Minister in the intervals of Conference; which you could not, in many cases, otherwise have done. Did you then intend to renounce that privilege in your zeal against Special District Meetings? If you did, this is in proof that you must have aimed not at the preservation of Methodism as settled in 1795 and 1797, but at some quite *new* system, substantially, for instance, that of the Independents; for you never could intend to give up this protection to yourselves without some substitute for it, which would have involved greater projects of change than perhaps you were aware of, but which were not unthought of by those who penned your Address and Resolutions. If, however, you did not intend to renounce this privilege, you did not

intend to denounce all Special District Meetings, and all interferences with the local affairs of a Circuit ; you would keep the privilege of using Special District Meetings to try the cases of Preachers, and to remove them ; and you disclaim them only when they are called to repress faction and disorder among the people. Brethren, is this fair dealing ? In the interval of Conference, a Preacher shall be held liable to be removed by a Special District Meeting ; but no Leader, no Local Preacher, shall be interfered with in any manner, even when the "local jurisdiction," as you term it, is factiously interrupted in the exercise of its functions. You claim liberty for yourselves ; but, I pray you, on whom do you put the yoke ? Again, you have been instructed to argue, from the Minutes of 1797, against the interposition of the Conference or of any Special District Meeting, First in the "local affairs" of a Circuit generally, and, Secondly, in the trial of its Officers; and the inference you wish to impress upon those among whom you circulate your Address and Resolutions, is, that this is an innovation upon a solemn "compact," recently and for the first time sanctioned, and which, as an instance of arbitrary power in the Conference, is to be resisted by all the friends of real Methodism.

I take, then, First, your denial of a constitutional right of interference with the local affairs of Circuits in any case, by the Conference or a District Meeting ; and what shall we say to the sagacity or fairness of your adviser and interpreter in this matter, or to your incaution in not examining for yourselves, when the very same Minutes of 1797, to which you appeal, give to the President of the Conference the "right, when written to *by any* who are concerned, to visit *any Circuit*, and to inquire into their affairs with respect to Methodism, and, in union with the DISTRICT COMMITTEE, redress *any grievance?*" Here is another instance of power given, not to Preachers only, but to "any who are concerned," to call upon the President for the time being, to unite with a District Committee to redress any grievances which may have arisen in a Circuit, and, consequently, to interfere with its "local concerns ;" and upon this very Rule I, when in that office, had a long journey imposed upon me, upon a call, not from the Preachers of a Circuit, but from men who now most heartily take part with you and with the dissentients at Leeds. They had not then discovered, that a Circuit had an inviolable Independency within itself; nor were the dissentients at Leeds more successful, who never objected to the Special District Meeting held there on this ground until it was suggested by your Address. This great discovery was first made to you ; and I am truly sorry that you should have entertained so absurd a novelty with so much deference.

But this is not all ; the very same Minutes of 1797, to which you appeal as the ground for your denying the right of the Conference, or a District Meeting, to interfere in "the local affairs" of a Circuit, contain two other provisions for interference with Circuits, by external influence and authority ; and could these Minutes then have been under your eye when you consented to put your names to the Resolutions you have circulated ? The First is that which empowers a Chairman, in cases which in his judgment cannot be settled in the ordinary District Meeting, to increase the "power" of a District, by summoning three of the nearest Superintendents to be incorporated with the District Committee, who shall have equal authority to vote, and *settle every thing* till the Conference." Here then, in these very Minutes which you contend for as containing the Constitution of the body, is another provision for a Special District Meeting, to take cognizance of all extraordinary cases which are supposed, in the judgment of the Chairman, to be of so great difficulty as not to be "settled in the ordinary District Meeting," and to settle all such extraordinary cases, "until the Conference;" to whom the final *appeal* is to be made ; and who, by this constitutional document, as you yourselves confess it to be, is thus recognized as the body in which the common government of the Connexion is invested. Your reasoning on the *powers* of this District Meeting will be afterwards noticed.

The Second is, that "the Conference recommends it to the Superintendents of the Circuits to invite, on all important occasions, the *Chairman* of their respective Districts to be present at their Quarterly Meetings ;" and thus to interfere officially, by advice and influence, in the "local affairs" of Circuits. Now this you call "the Constitution of 1797," which you say in your Resolutions it is the object of your Address "to *maintain*." But you blow hot and cold in this matter ; for instead of "maintaining" this Constitution, you reject every thing in it which does not please you, and you set up a principle in direct opposition, not to its spirit only, but to its very letter, by denying all power or authority in the Methodist Conference, or in any District Meeting, to interfere in the "local affairs" of Circuits : Nay, you resolve, in the very teeth of the last "constitutional" regulation, to *forbid* any Preacher, the Chairman of a District therefore not excepted, "from attending any of your local meetings" without special leave of such meeting, and without a positive engagement on the part of every Preacher to withdraw immediately on being requested to do so by any member of the Meeting !" Is it possible that you should not see, that having been deluded by sophistical reasoning on one part of that constitution, you have set yourselves in direct opposition to another ; that instead

of pleading for the whole constitution, which you affect to applaud, you clamour for one part of it only, and will have even that in your own construction of its meaning ? The plea of " maintaining" Methodism is a poor disguise which has been assumed by some designing men in order to beguile you ; and you have followed far too implicitly their artful leadings, instead of your own good judgment. If you really wish constitutional Methodism, here it is, in the Minutes of 1795 and 1797 ; but you spurn it, and yet say you wish to maintain Methodism ! I fear that those who advised you care nothing for Methodism, and for the Constitution of 1797 ; and the way in which they have drawn up your Resolutions makes this but too manifest ; but it would have been much more honest in them to have said, " We want a *new* Constitution for Methodism," which is the fact. Then, indeed, the discussion would have assumed an open and honourable form. But they knew that you could not be brought to this, and they " took you by guile." How, my Brethren, could you suffer yourselves to be thus played upon, and that by an artifice which you must have so soon detected had you suffered yourselves to examine the subject ?

You have placed yourselves, indeed, in an unpleasant position before the Connexion, by thus claiming " the Constitution of 1797," when you openly and expressly reject several parts of that Constitution, as expressed in the Minutes of that year in so many distinct provisions, not to be misunderstood. But some of you perhaps may say, perceiving the difficulty in which you have placed yourselves, that by denying the interference of the Conference or of a District Meeting, you *mean* only an interference to try " local officers." I rather think you have been artfully caught by this, and were thus led much farther than many of you intended. But what have you *said* and *signed* in your Seventh Resolution ? You there First, deny universally, and without any exception, the right of Conference-interference in the *local affairs* of this Circuit ; and then more particularly, Secondly, its interference to try your officers ; for your words are,— " We utterly deny all right, power, or authority, either in the Methodist Conference, or in any District Meeting, to interfere in the *local affairs* of this Circuit, OR to try, suspend, or expel any *local officer* or *member* of society." Thus you deny the interference first in *any case*, and then specially in a particular case mentioned. In denying the first I have already shown you that you renounce the first principles of Methodism, and substantially set up the Independent form of church government, and also directly reject that very Constitution of 1797 to which you appeal. I think if you hear me with the same candour and friendly feeling with which I address you, I can show you that you are equally *unconstitutional* on the Second point.

You deny, then, the right, power, or authority of the Conference, or of a District Committee appointed by it, and responsible to it, "to try, suspend, or expel any local officer or member of society." What do you mean by this? Did you ever know your officers or members tried, suspended, or expelled by the Conference, by a District Meeting, or even by a Superintendent, since 1797, on his own authority? You never did. Since the last Conference you may have had trials, suspensions, and expulsions. Have they not then all proceeded according to the Rules of 1797? Nothing new has occurred among you. You cannot, therefore, mean that the Conference has set up a claim to displace your ordinary tribunals in the ordinary course of things. Nay, even in the extraordinary circumstances of the Leeds case, no man was tried by the District Meeting, but by the Meeting to which, as Local Preacher or Leader, he belonged. Seeing then all *ordinary* cases are out of the question, you must mean to deny that in no *extraordinary* case of any kind, the Conference or a District Meeting has any right or power "to try, suspend, or exclude any local officer or member." You deny this universally. You deny it, therefore, in all cases where the local officer or member might be, in every sense, worthy of exclusion, as well as where he might not be so worthy. Let us then take such a case,—a case of immorality, a case of false doctrine, a case of notorious insubordination to the Rules of the body, even of those Rules which you still acknowledge to be binding. It is clear that if the local tribunals did their duty, the offender would be admonished or expelled in the ordinary way, and no interference of Conference or of a District be required. This interference would not, therefore, take place. It could only be in a case in which the Circuit tribunals did not do their duty that the interference would be necessary. This failure of duty might be from criminal neglect, or from the accused being supported by a faction of which the Leaders' or Local Preachers' meeting might be afraid, or from his having a party in those meetings, and that party the majority. These circumstances would constitute an extraordinary case; and you deny that in such an extraordinary state of things any interference ought to take place. This is the position to be examined; and the first question which arises, is, "What then would be the condition of such a Society?" It would be left to the privilege of its own "local jurisdiction" it is true; but immorality, false doctrine, or faction would ride triumphant over it, and leave it a dead and corrupt branch hanging upon the common stock; and yet defended by this principle of yours from all pruning, or propping, or other means of restoration. What advantage then would a society derive from its union with a Connexion, and from the additional security which such a form of

ecclesiastical existence affords, above that of mere Independency ? Clearly none ; for your principle throws that wholly away. The next question is, " What, in this case, would be the condition of the Preacher, supposing him to be a conscientious man ? " and you would not the more respect us if we made the prevalent opinion of a society, in such a case, the rule of our consciences, and reduced ourselves to the level of hirelings, and time-servers. He would see, in the case supposed, the purity of the Church polluted and the table of the Lord profaned, or destructive errors disseminated, or faction and misrule triumphant, without any power to avail himself of the counsel and influence of his Brethren, to redress the grievance. The third question is, " What would be the state of the remaining sound and religious part of the society ? " for the question is not one in which we, as Preachers, alone are concerned. It was not so at Leeds, although you appear to have thought it proper to omit this consideration. A large portion of the society there was to be protected in the peaceable enjoyment of their rights, and in their desire to walk by the Rules of the body ; and they demanded protection. In the very possible case I have supposed, you yourselves might be the peaceable, well-affected, and faithful minority, over whose " local jurisdictions," fear, or faction, or corrupt doctrines, or laxity of discipline, might exercise a paralyzing influence. What then, upon your own principle, would be your condition ? You would have no remedy at all. You reject, in this case, the advantages of belonging to a CONNEXION ; you bar up every avenue to the interposition of counsel and authority, and leave yourselves no resource but to remain in fellowship with the corrupt, the factious, and those who will no longer bear " sound doctrine ;" or to abandon your chapels and the body, and seek relief in some more efficient system than that which has no power to coerce the bad, and to protect the good. In vain would you have connected yourselves with us, for we could not come in to your help, any more than to the help of a Church professedly and really Independent.

I have indeed supposed a case in which the accused persons are really and obviously culpable, and merit the exercise of discipline ; for as you have excluded the interference of the Conference and of its Committees *in all cases*, I have a right to try your principle upon such an instance ; and this is, I hope, sufficient to show you its mischievous, and, so long as you profess to be a part of a CONNEXION, its absurd, character. You may, indeed, suppose a case in which the Conference might interfere against an officer or officers, excellent in character, peaceable in conduct, sound in doctrine, and willing to walk themselves, and to teach others to walk, by the received and established Rules of the body : But this I will say,—you never

knew such a case ; that the Conference, which exists only by its hold on the public opinion of the body, could not attempt so flagrant an injustice ; that unless the Preachers were to become generally corrupt and bad men, they could feel no inclination or even motive to attempt it ; and that unless a part of the people had become as corrupt as themselves, they could find no support in so doing. If the Leeds case were quite so clear an instance of this as you have been taught to think it, the great body of that society, comprising its most intelligent and charactered members, could not have given to the Special District Meeting and to the Conference its support and thanks ; and your Address and Resolutions would have had a better reception in our principal societies and among our most reflecting friends, instead of meeting, as in this intelligent and influential Circuit, a most unequivocal condemnation, from, I believe, every one.

But your principle is not only to be proved unwise and injurious, because it throws down a guard in which you are as much interested as we Preachers, and in which we are only interested for the sake of the body at large, but it is *contradicted*, like the former more general one, by the very "Constitution of 1797" to which you appeal.

To leave out all considerations of temporal concerns, and the Rule as to new Laws, neither of which are now in question, that "Constitution," as far as concession to the people is concerned, consisted chiefly in the "checks" imposed upon the office of Superintendent, who had originally, as transferred from Mr. Wesley, in his own hands, unless he chose to consult others, the sole power of admitting and expelling members, and of appointing and displacing officers. This the Minutes of the Conference of that year will clearly show. These "checks" were placed upon the every-day official acts of the Superintendent ; a circumstance which plainly shows that the ORDINARY course of the exercise and enforcement of discipline was all along understood both by the party making, and by the party receiving those concessions, in order to settle the questions of government which in that day had arisen. But that in EXTRAORDINARY cases, in which all law should be trampled under foot, and attempts made to introduce new and foreign principles of government by violence and faction, the Conference should not interfere to remedy, by authority, an otherwise irremediable state of things, is a position which, although much empty effort is used by the writer of your Address, in order to deceive you and others through you, is most easily refuted, 1. By the fact that this is a discovery for the first time made by himself. It was never so understood certainly by Preachers or people ; never urged in any former dispute

on constitutional points ; never thought of by the Leeds dissentients till they seized it as a new topic of factious declamation from your Address. Acute and discerning minds, sharpened by the eagerness of contention, have been often turned to these regulations without seeing what to them would have been a very agreeable doctrine ; and if, therefore, the author of your Address should plume himself upon his sagacity, it may correct his vanity to be told, that as superior intellects have missed this interpretation, it may be the dream of a weak mind as probably as the discovery of a strong one. Its novelty is, however, fatal to the argument ; for a practical principle could never have been kept out of sight for more than thirty years.

2. But it is more particularly refuted by the fact, which appears on the face of those Minutes of Conference themselves, that this kind of interposition by the Conference and the Authorities appointed by it, is, in extraordinary cases, expressly provided for in the "Constitution" to which you appeal. There is, for instance, in these very "constitutional" Minutes of 1797, a Rule for the express object of making "our Districts more effective ;" and one of the provisions which follows, is that I have already adverted to, which empowers the President, "when written to by *any* concerned," Preachers or people, "to visit any Circuit, and to inquire into their affairs with reference to **METHODISM**,"—a very general subject of inquiry ; "and, in union with the District Committee, *redress any grievance*,"—which must of course include all the evils that may be complained of, and which ordinary means were found inadequate to redress, whether the cause of the evil were a Preacher or a local Officer, or the redress required were persuasion, admonition, suspension, or expulsion. This is the first of the regulations found in the Minutes of 1797, under the head, "Miscellaneous." The second makes "the Chairman of the District, in conjunction with his Brethren of the Committee," "responsible to the Conference for *the execution of the Laws*, as far as his District is concerned," or extends. This is another large provision against difficult and extraordinary cases. If the Laws are executed, the interposing power, of course, lies dormant ; if resisted, and the ordinary means fail, then they are to be "executed" upon the responsibility of the District, no matter who are concerned to uphold their violation. The third expressly enlarges the power of the District, in order to *that enforcement of the Laws* mentioned in the preceding regulation, by adding to the "ordinary District Meeting," in cases, the settlement of which is thought by the Chairman to be above the power of the District, (cases, therefore, of an *extraordinary* kind, and expressly distinguished from "ordinary" ones,) three Superin-

tendents not of the District, to be incorporated with it. The Meeting so constituted is "to settle every thing till Conference;" meaning clearly, as being in connexion with the foregoing regulation, every thing which opposes "the execution of the Laws;" all disorder, and faction, and evil, which is not, or cannot be, put down by ordinary means. Where then is your principle? The "Constitution" provides that no person shall be expelled from Society, or be removed from his office, but in conjunction with the Leaders' Meeting; and expressly tells you that this is "a check upon the SUPERINTENDENT," regulating powers which were previously exercised by him without control of the Leaders' Meeting, and exercised by him in the *ordinary* course of official duty; but so far from there being a word to shut out the right and authority of THE CONFERENCE from interposing in extraordinary emergencies, this same Constitution expressly provides for it!

The author of your Address strangely confounds ordinary with extraordinary cases; and has misled you, and perhaps himself: Yet still he could not but see that these regulations respecting District Meetings stood very unluckily in the way of his argument; and he has laboured hard and wearily to pervert their plain and, it might have been supposed, unmistakable meaning. You have unwittingly adopted the sophistry, obvious as it is to any one who has read our Rules with attention; and I therefore further beg your patience whilst I point it out to you. A more dishonest attempt was never made to impose upon unsuspecting men, happily better employed as you generally have been with the spiritual ends of your union as a religious body, than with questions of policy. In order to prove that in all cases, extraordinary as well as ordinary, Travelling Preachers alone are amenable to District Meetings and the Conference, he has told you, that Leaders', Local Preachers', and Quarterly Meetings were in existence before District Meetings, even during Mr. Wesley's life; and then asserts, which it is hard to admit he could do ignorantly, that "they had always retained in their own hands the inalienable right of the Church to try its own members." Of the more recent regulation, by which the trial of members is appointed to be in the presence of their respective Meetings, I, and all my Brethren, I believe, greatly approve; but no such "*right*" was ever given to the Meetings before the year 1797. The writer of your Address either knew, or ought to have known, that Mr. Wesley and the Superintendents after him, although they took counsel of others, as wishing only to employ their power righteously, yet had the power, and often exercised it, to admit, expel, and remove from office, without any reference to such Meetings at all. Nay, this power in Superintendents was the point complained of, when what you call "the Constitution" was

settled ; as appears from so many plain words, which no one can mistake ; and was the very thing conceded by the Conference to those "local meetings," for the first time. How disingenuous then, in the face of so clear a fact, to assert the contrary, in order to bolster up a futile argument ! Equally culpable is the assertion, "that during this period the judicial power of the Conference itself had been *limited* and *confined* (according to the Eighth Article of the Deed of Declaration, 1784, by which Mr. Wesley *defined* the powers of the Conference) to the trial and expulsion of members of the Conference admitted into Connexion, or received on trial." Now to "define" is truly understood by your Address-writer to mean, "to limit or confine ;" but in this Article of the Deed there is no act of limitation. It is a clause to give power, not to define power : "The Conference *shall* and *may* expel, and *put out* any member thereof," &c. The clause has nothing, therefore, to do with the question. No one need be told that the Conference never did try Leaders and members before its own bar, but before the Meetings it has appointed for that purpose. There is no discovery here ; the question alone respects its power to interpose in extraordinary cases, to which the clause in the Deed has no reference one way or other, being wholly on another subject. But that the Conference always had that power, appears not only from its having exercised it in former times without any one dreaming that it went beyond its authority ; from the very nature of its relation to the Societies, as vested by common consent with the government of the whole body ; but also from "the Constitution" of 1797, where it delegates its own powers to its President, to the Chairmen of Districts, and to the District Committees, to interfere in such cases, and "execute the laws ;"—to which arrangement of things the Connexion has been cheerfully consenting from that time till now. I admit, therefore, that *triad* of principles in the seventh page of your Address ; by the magical touch of which, their author attempts to turn day into darkness. Certainly, a District can possess no power which the Conference does not possess ; but this power of interference the Conference does possess, did always possess, and proceeds upon in "that Constitution of 1797," (which you claim to "maintain,") in its directions to District Meetings. Equally may we admit that Districts are limited in their authority by the *express terms* of their commission ; but these terms are large enough to meet all such cases ; they are "*to redress any grievance,*" "*to execute the laws,*" and to "*settle every thing till the Conference.*" Your third Rule also lies as forcibly against all the reasoning of your Address, as the two former ; for here is no question of doubtful application at all, if "the laws" are obstructed.

The great object of the whole of Part I. of your Address, is to

show, that Special District Meetings, the constitutional character of which cannot be denied, are confined in their "jurisdiction" to accused Preachers only. You are very willing, my friends, it seems, to keep us amenable to these disputed tribunals; although you disclaim them for yourselves in every case. The *reasoning* (if bold assertion can be so called) from the *primitive rights* of Leaders' and other Meetings, and from the Conference Deed, has been adverted to. What follows as *argument* from various Minutes of Conference on the subject of District Meetings, is so absurd, that it would be even amusing, were it not that one cannot but feel deep sorrow, that so many of you should have yielded yourselves, in your haste, to be abused by it. A Minute of 1791 directs the summoning of a District "*on any critical case*," which, according to the judgment of the Assistant, merits such an "interference." But you say, "*the critical case*" intended by the Rule *must be* "*such a case*," for instance, as the trial and suspension of a Travelling Preacher; that is, the phrase, "*ANY critical case*," must mean the *particular* case of a Travelling Preacher! Yet there is no restriction in the Rule to the cases of Preachers, no hint of such restriction. Why then "*must*" it be restricted? To the reasons given, which have already been refuted, you add, it must be one "*with which no existing local authority has power to deal*;" which is so far right: But you add, "*the local authorities have full power to deal with any case affecting local officers and members of society, and therefore it cannot be applied to such cases.*" True, not to cases where the Superintendent and the local meetings use that power to settle the matter; for then no "*critical case*" exists, the law proceeds without obstruction, and all is right. But the very circumstance which generally constitutes a critical case, is that the local authorities have either not the power to deal with it, or refuse to exercise it; and then the Rule applies, whether the case be that in which a Preacher, an officer, or a private member be concerned.

A third specimen of direct perversion in your Address appears on p. 9. The Minutes of 1792 make "*further regulations*" concerning Districts, and give several directions as to their proceedings when any accusations lie against *Preachers*; and the argument upon this, by the author of your Address, is this truly *legitimate* one:—That because directions respecting the trial of *Preachers* before District Meetings are given in these Minutes, therefore *none but Preachers* are amenable to District Meetings, and the Conference, of which they are but the Committeees. Just as well might he have argued that because one of these regulations respects the proceedings when Chairmen are to be tried by the District, that

none but Chairmen are amenable to that authority. But a dust of words must be raised to hide from you the inanity of the inference. In these Rules, we are therefore told, “the *proper jurisdiction* of a Special District is recognised.” No doubt of that; but the object of the Rules was not to show how far its jurisdiction extends, for we have not a word to that purpose. But “the *powers* also of a Special District are defined.” Not at all; in the sense of your Address. The object of the Rule was not to *define* the powers of Special Districts generally, which your Address assumes; but to give powers and directions in cases particularly specified, without excluding others. Nor do I assert this without proof, for I would not follow so bad an example as the writer of your Address. To see that this Minute was neither intended to explain the proper *jurisdiction* of a District, nor to define its *powers*, you have only need to turn to your own Address where you quote the question to which the three regulations are a reply:—“What FURTHER regulations shall be made respecting the management of the Districts?” The Rules which follow, are, therefore, these FURTHER regulations: Regulations *added* to many others before existing; and to give these “*further*” regulations was the intention of the Minute, and not certainly to define either the “*jurisdictions*” or “*powers*” of Districts generally. The argument from the Minute of 1793 is precisely of the same loose character, only still more absurd. Its regulations respect the calling of a Meeting, not of the District, but of four Preachers out of a District, and direct them how to proceed in the case of an accused Preacher, or of a difference between two Preachers; but here also we are told, that the jurisdiction of Special Districts is *expressly* (*expressly* too!) DEFINED, when we have not a word of definition, nor of the limitation of the jurisdiction of such meetings! Your Address then comes to the Constitution of 1797, and here I see another painful specimen of very unworthy misrepresentation. The checks placed upon the Superintendent’s authority, are the subject of several of the regulations; but the object of your Address is to show, that District Meetings were then stripped of their authority to interfere with any thing local, and were confined as to their jurisdiction to Preachers. But if all this was so evident from the Minutes of 1791, 1792, and 1793, on which you before argue, why need you have gone to the Minutes of 1797 for proofs that these obnoxious powers were *then* given up? If you are right in one case, you must be wrong in the other: If they were given up before 1797, they could not be surrendered in 1797; if they were surrendered then, they could not have been given up in the former years. But, my Brethren, here again it may be supposed that you did not read the Minutes for yourselves, but implicitly

trusted in the fairness of your agent. He has quoted for you the words of the Conference ; when speaking of their concessions, they say, " Our District Committees themselves have hardly any authority remaining." But he has quoted them in no very creditable manner; for the " authority " spoken of is not the authority of the Districts in matters of discipline, for the same Minutes make the Districts responsible for " the execution of the laws;" but it is (will you not be surprised at your own simplicity in permitting yourselves to be so misled by another ?) their authority in *financial matters*, and in them only ; for the words of Conference, if your agent had fully quoted them, are, " Our District Committees themselves have hardly any authority remaining, but a *bare negative* in general :" So that if the authority there spoken of, as given up, were the authority, as you pretend, of interfering with your local discipline, you yourselves acknowledge that the Conference have retained at least " a bare negative " upon your proceedings, which is no small degree of interference. But the Conference had already explained its own meaning in the preceding page, when, summing up the concessions made, they say, " The whole management of our *temporal concerns* may now truly be said to be invested in the Quarterly Meetings ; the District Meetings having nothing left them, but a *negative*." To what disgraceful perversions has the writer of the Address committed you !

In the next instance on which the author of your Address tries his skill, he is manifestly perplexed. In cases which, in the judgment of the Chairman, cannot be settled in the *ordinary* District Meeting, the " power " of the District is to be increased by the addition of three Superintendents ; and the District, thus constituted, is to settle every thing till Conference. This " settling *every thing*," you tell us, means settling matters of charge and accusation against Preachers only, but allows of no interference with " local jurisdictions." The answer to this is, as before, on the Minute of 1791, if the case be one of the ordinary exercise of discipline, it needs no interfering with ; but the case is an extraordinary one, as appears from the face of the Rule ; a case which is so extraordinary indeed in its aspect, as to be judged above the powers of the *ordinary* District Meeting to cope with ; a case which it must take up, but a case which it must be strengthened by the counsel, and influence, and votes, of those extra Superintendents to deal with. What answer is it then to make to this provision for an extraordinary emergency, to tell us, as you gravely do, that the Conference of 1797 declared, " that the Districts had hardly any authority remaining," when that declaration, as I have shown, respects " temporal affairs ;" for what

has this to do with the matter ? Or that "a check was put upon the Superintendent's authority," by this Conference, when this Rule respects a District, not a Superintendent in the ordinary exercise of his duty ? Or that there are no "*express terms*" which authorize interference with a local jurisdiction, when, *whatever* the matter of discipline may be, the District is empowered "to settle it by its vote until the Conference ?" Or, finally, to crown the whole, that "local jurisdictions" "*must*" be excluded from the operation of this Rule, because it is *your opinion* that Special Districts have no powers of interference conferred on them by the whole class of Rules relating to them ? This, Brethren, is surely not to argue, but to trifle with yourselves and others. Even the slightest glance at the Minutes might have shown you, that such a Rule could not have been made to effect, as you pretend, a mere "change of Preachers" in the intervals of Conference, upon any dispute arising in a Circuit, for which case provision is made in the first of the two Regulations you have inserted in page 12, by simply giving power to the President to sanction that change. The Second Regulation you have quoted is wholly distinct from the former, and is, indeed, the Third in the Minutes, another coming in between, which relates to the Chairmen of Districts.* It is a provision made expressly for cases of a specially "critical" and "extraordinary" nature ; and was manifestly made for no end at all, if it include not, in its general and unrestricted terms, a power to restore and enforce discipline in any Circuit, where the peculiarity of the case renders the interposition of authority necessary and imperative.

I have now, Brethren, gone with you into the constitutional question involved ; and I hope I may have proved, to the satisfaction of some of you at least, that you have dealt very unfairly with the Rules of 1797 ; that those Rules expressly sanction and appoint the holding of Special District Meetings, in cases where the ordinary discipline is interrupted ; that your principle of the inviolability of local jurisdictions, in such extraordinary cases, is not only unconstitutional, but a renouncing of one of the guards and privileges of protection which that Constitution has provided for the maintenance of our union, our peace, our purity of doctrine and manners, and our discipline ; and that to reject the right of interposition in such cases by the Conference, and the Authorities appointed by it,

* This intermediate Rule is artfully left out by the writer of the Address, for the sake of a dishonourable quirk. He would thus the more plausibly interpret the third of these Regulations by the first ; but even this does not serve his turn, for he is obliged to leave out a part even of the first !

acting under the control of their own discipline and their respect to the judgment of the wise and pious part of the societies whose connexion with us is purely voluntary, would be, on your part, wilfully to cast away the security which your connexion with the body affords you, and to adopt the simple form of an Independent Church, for which I am sure you are not prepared.

In the ordinary course of things you have the full benefit of the restrictions placed upon the *exercise* of our duties and powers as Ministers, with the right of putting us upon our trial before a Special District, demanded by yourselves, if we violate them. Where no extraordinary defection of faith, practice, and discipline, occurs, (and may you ever be kept from it!) no extraordinary power can be directed against you ; should that take place, the extraordinary power is of a remedial kind, in which you are in as great a degree interested as ourselves. Whenever that is called in, I think, indeed, and so do all my Brethren, as far as I know, that the necessity should be evident ; that the ordinary course of discipline should be interfered with as little as possible ; that affectionate counsel, and kind influence, should be the first means employed to remove the evil ; that tenderness should be exercised to the misled, and forgiveness offered to the penitent ; that every such case ought to be specially reported to the Conference, and be there carefully examined, and decided upon ; and that its door ought always, as now, to be kept open for respectful appeals from parties aggrieved. We are no advocates for arbitrary dealing ; give us that credit : We cannot have an interest separate from yours. But you are equally bound with us to maintain that salutary system of doctrine and discipline which has been committed both to you and to us ; and, give me leave to say, that you owe it, in Christian duty to us, to believe that this is our motive and endeavour, till you have strong evidence of the contrary, in order that the mutual confidence may be established and maintained betwixt Preachers and people, which is essential to the success of our Ministry among you. Some men may, indeed, arise among you, and in other places, who may prefer a different form of church government. Their opinions on these points they have a right to hold ; but then, on the other hand, they sin against Christian sincerity, if, under pretence of bringing us back to what is *old* in Methodism, they covertly endeavour to bring in what is *new* and essentially opposed to our bond of union, and then facetiously endeavour to disturb our societies by their publications. If they remain with us, holding such opinions, let them remain at peace ; if they wish any thing new, let them propose it as new, and not endeavour to seduce the unwary by false charges of our departure from a discipline, which, it is clear, they either do not

understand, or wilfully misrepresent; that so, by boldly assuming false premises, they may hang upon them plausible and delusive arguments.

You have yourselves been greatly misled by some such characters. They have practised upon your simplicity; in a heated moment of infirmity they got your sanction to an Address and to Resolutions, which you cannot approve upon reflection, unless, indeed, which I do not believe, you have really adopted the principles of those documents with a full understanding of their import and bearing. I cannot bring myself to think that one third of the persons who signed the Resolutions ever read with the least care the Minutes of Conference, on which the paltry sophistry of the Address is employed. If you have, and can still thus reason, I must, with great reluctance, admit that your judgment has been warped by principles decidedly anti-methodistical; if you have not, you see the effect of giving way to the spirit of party. You have committed yourselves to unsound reasonings, and to unsound principles; you have spoken evil of your Ministers; you have endeavoured to render us suspected in the estimation of our people; you have been disseminating seeds of strife and mischief; and if they have not taken root it has not been owing to you, but to the good sense and pacific disposition of our people; and for what end? —to uphold, you say, the Constitution of 1797, which, I have proved to you, is precisely such a Constitution as you object to and exclaim against; and to establish a principle which converts you from Methodists into Independents.

I leave these things to your consideration. Before you publish any thing more upon our "Constitution," as you please to term it, be sure you understand it; and try those who pretend to guide your judgment in those matters before you trust them. Remember that every man you meet has his project for mending matters of government, as every man can tell you of an infallible cure for the tooth-ache. But the oftener you try the experiment, the more doubtful of these pretensions you will become. Good government is the joint result of public virtue and long experience; both are found in the Connexion to which you belong; and the result is one which more calls for thankfulness to God, than for suspicions one of another. Whatever may improve our institutions, and make them more consistent with the original ends of our union, or keep them up vigorously to their leading principles, is matter for brotherly, fair discussion. For which of us does not wish that, as a people, we may be made more useful, united, and holy? But let no man attack the vital principles of the Connexion, whilst he professes attachment to it. Let him not say, "Hail!" and betray it with "a kiss;" and if on

any innocent subject of discussion his opinions should not meet with so cordial a reception as he thinks they deserve, and fail of working the same conviction in others as they have wrought in him, let him not think it a highly Christian proceeding to assail his Ministers and his religious associates with calumny and aspersions. Let every one feel that when party spirit is excited in the Church, some minds are sure to suffer spiritual loss, and some souls must be endangered; and that therefore unfriendly discussions are to be dreaded as fraught with dangers. All these subjects will, I know, be lost upon heady and opinionated men; but, I trust, not upon you. For some of you, I hope, may show as great a readiness to renounce the errors and culpable proceedings into which you have been led, as you have discovered to be led into them. I have not followed your Address into the Leeds case, because if I have shown that you have proceeded to judge of it on false principles, the application of the more correct ones I have endeavoured to set before you, will, on the main points at least, present it to you under a different aspect. If you continue to hold opinions which have no countenance in any thing that Methodism ever was, or I believe ever will be, you will continue to form, not only of that, but of all similar cases, a very mis-directed judgment. I have spoken to you with plainness, but with affection; and if you ask why I, a Preacher not in your Circuit, should thus seem to trespass upon your favourite notion of the inviolability of your own "local jurisdiction," I have only to say, that you have gone out of it yourselves; you have gone into the "local jurisdiction" of the Leeds Circuit; and into that of mine also, where you, by the circulation of your papers, have endeavoured, though without any effect, to hold up me and my Brethren to the suspicion of the people among whom we minister, as disposed to tyrannize over them, and to rob them of their true liberty in Christ. Notwithstanding this, I sincerely wish you an entire restoration to a right judgment and a right feeling; and, as one who has laboured happily among you in time past, shall rejoice to hear of your spiritual prosperity.

I am,
Yours affectionately,
 RICHARD WATSON.

MANCHESTER,
 December 29, 1828.